



THE WILDERNESS LAND TRUST

SPRING 2023 NEWS

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MISSION

We Keep the Promise of Wilderness – by acquiring and transferring private lands to public ownership to complete designated and proposed wilderness areas, or directly protect wilderness values.

VALUES

We revere our remaining wild places, a legacy to pass on to future generations, the tenacity to work until the job is done and treating everyone with fairness.

VISION

We envision a National Wilderness Preservation System that is complete, secure and accessible.

On the cover:
Mt. Baker Wilderness
in Washington.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

The snow is blowing sideways outside my office window as I draft this opening to our spring newsletter. The latest arctic front to descend on Montana with its customary ferocity. But by the time this issue reaches your mailbox, the bitter cold will have given way to warmer, longer days and the arrival of the spring equinox.

As we enter a season that celebrates new growth, we are actively working to enhance our organization's internal oversight, raise greater public awareness and financial support of our work, and expand the scope and scale of our projects to protect our nation's treasured wilderness areas.

The cumulative wisdom, experience and dedication of our board of directors steer the organization, and this fiscal year we welcomed new board members Ray Hohenberger, Travis Belote, PhD, and Connie Myers. They bring extensive legal and financial expertise; knowledge of ecosystem science, conservation and adaptability, and experience on the proper application of wilderness law, regulation and policy in the United States respectively.

For 30 years the Trust has utilized a method developed with researchers from Colorado State University to prioritize the acquisition of wilderness inholdings in the western U.S. and guide our efforts to successfully protect more than 55,000 acres to date. In a rapidly changing world, we are utilizing new science to update this system, taking into account important ecological factors such as resilience to climate change, support for biodiversity and migration corridors, and opportunities to engage marginalized communities in the develop of new projects.

We are actively working to enhance our organization and expand the scope of our projects to protect our nation's treasured wilderness areas.

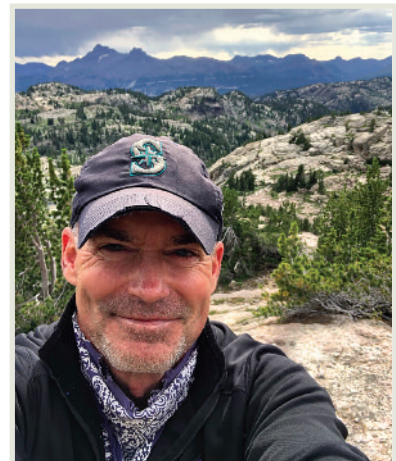
This systematic approach will not only benefit the continued pursuit of our mission, it will also be applied to a robust inventory of properties that sit directly adjacent to federally designated wilderness – what we call edgeholdings – that can both protect and potentially expand existing wilderness.

Finally, you may have noticed fresh new ideas being woven into our communication platforms, including this newsletter. As the length of time and complexity of our project increases, so does the cost of doing business. This spring we are excited to have Margosia Jadkowski, our new director of marketing and communications to help raise awareness, support and spread the word across the country about our good work!

As we eagerly begin our fourth decade of protecting the wild places you and your family love as evidenced in the pages ahead, I'm confident this growth will only add to our long history of success.

Thank you for being an invaluable partner on this journey together!

Brad Borst, President



the meaning of wilderness

Wilderness is a necessity.

Wilderness protects the ecosystems that provide the clean air and water vital to all life. Wilderness is necessary if we are to rise to the global challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss that we are facing. And it is a necessity to the human spirit, a unique source of inspiration, humility, connection, and solitude.

Wilderness is dynamic.

We sometimes think of wilderness as preserving the world how it was, but wilderness is dynamic and ever changing. Whether it is the transition between seasons, an ecosystem rebuilding itself after wildfire, habitat slowly shifting due to a changing climate, or a new generation of adventurers experiencing it in a different way, wilderness is always changing. In protecting it we are not just preserving what was, we are giving it the space it needs to change with the natural cycles that have governed it for millennia.

This winter as our staff gathered for our annual retreat we sat around a picnic table under the California sun, listening to the far-away crash of waves against the shore.

We started our time together with a simple question: "what does wilderness mean to you?" And one by one we shared the stories and beliefs that have driven us all to this work.

Not surprisingly, given our diverse backgrounds and experiences, we all had a different answer, and what followed was an inspiring conversation of what connects us, as individuals and a collective, to the wild places we love, and what we hope to leave behind for our children and their children.

We look forward to hearing what wilderness means to you!

Wilderness is for everyone.

Wilderness is a collective ideal, meant to benefit us all, not profit the few. There are still barriers to inclusion and accessibility which we need to bring down, but at its core wilderness is for everyone. It has the capacity to hold different kinds of relationships with the land, from indigenous knowledge and deep belonging to a child's first time seeing the night stars. Its plurality is one of the most magical things about wilderness – it can mean so many things to so many different people.

Wilderness is a refuge.

From hundreds of endangered species holding on in the most remote corners of wilderness, to you and me, wilderness provides a refuge from many of the pressures of a fast-changing world and daily life.

It is a refuge from the built human landscape that surrounds it, welcoming all who need room to roam free from development, roads, and fence lines.

Wilderness is a legacy.

The Wilderness Act was passed almost 60 years ago, but it is part of a much longer legacy of protecting wild places in the U.S., stretching back to the establishment of our first National Park in 1872 and far beyond that with the kincentric management practiced by native peoples for thousands of years. Wilderness is a legacy we have inherited from all those who have worked to establish it, and it is a legacy we continue to work to protect for generations to come.

Share what wilderness means to you in our annual community survey!

To complete the 2023 survey visit
wildernesslandtrust.org/survey



RECENT SUCCESSES

In the past year the Trust has acquired and transferred private properties within wilderness across the West, but the real accomplishments of this work extend beyond the number of properties or total acres. They lie in the conservation values that make these wild places what they are, and so important to protect. We are proud to share these recent successes made possible by our wonderful partners and supporters.

CONNECTED ECOSYSTEMS

Every private inholding that becomes designated wilderness creates a more connected ecosystem, removing management conflicts and barriers to wildlife migration corridors. This has been especially true in the Silver Creek drainage in Washington's **Wild Sky** and **Henry M. Jackson Wilderness** areas where a patchwork of ownership and protection covers much of the drainage. The Trust has been working in this area for years and has protected 21 parcels so far, including over 300 acres this year, bringing us one step closer to unifying protection across the landscape. In Los Padres National Forest of California, the Trust completed

the transfer of the final piece of over 1,000 acres in the Trout Creek area to public ownership, connecting the **Santa Lucia** and **Garcia Wilderness Areas** with a proposed new wilderness area, paving the way for connected habitat between all three. Finally, farther north in California's **Mendocino National Forest**, the Trust purchased the 800-acre Thomas Creek project, securing a connection between lower elevation oak woodland habitat to higher elevation mature conifer forest. These projects all represent important steps in removing habitat fragmentation and ensuring wilderness values are protected across the larger landscape.

In Washington, we recently added 38 acres to the Mount Baker Wilderness including alpine meadows that support a rich diversity of species.



By removing habitat fragmentation, our projects benefit endangered species like the California Condor.

BIODIVERSITY

Globally we are facing a crisis of biodiversity loss. Research has shown that lands with the highest level of protection, which in the U.S. is designated wilderness, are most effective at preserving biodiversity, making all of the Trust's work expanding wilderness areas important. But a few projects have particularly high impact in protecting biodiversity. In the eastern Sierra of California, the **Bodie Hills** rank in the top 10% of all unprotected BLM lands in California based on biodiversity factors. This year we completed the transfer of 1,698 acres to public ownership, bringing the total protected by the Trust there to over 7,000 acres. Other projects are particularly important to protecting biodiversity because of the specific habitat elements they contain. The Trust recently purchased the 9-acre Stranger Lode in the **Holy Cross Wilderness** of Colorado, protecting the shores of Cleveland Lake, which at an elevation of over 11,000' is a biodiversity hotspot in the harsh high-alpine environment. In Washington, we recently added 38 acres to the **Mount Baker Wilderness** including impressive old-growth stands of Silver Fir interspersed with alpine meadows that support a rich diversity of species.

CLIMATE RESILIENCE

As our climate changes, ecosystems across the globe are facing new pressures, making them vulnerable. However, we can help build their resilience to endure significant precipitation and temperature changes by increasing their overall health and protecting important resources within them.

High in the **Mount Baker Wilderness** of Washington, the Trust purchased the 20-acre Fourth of July Lode, protecting one of the wilderness area's 13 remaining glaciers, which contributes to the larger ecosystem's resiliency by supplying a reliable water source throughout the summer, no matter that year's precipitation. The Tongass National Forest of Alaska has been called 'America's Climate Forest' because of its unrivaled ability to mitigate climate impacts by absorbing massive amounts of carbon. This year the Trust purchased 33 acres of it in the **Chuck River** and **Kootznoowoo Wilderness Areas**, protecting the immediate area's resiliency, and preserving the wider reaching benefits of the forest's carbon absorption.

PUBLIC ACCESS

The patchwork of ownership that private wilderness inholdings create can put public access at risk. In many cases public trails crossing private property are based on handshake agreements and don't have permanent legal access. When that property changes hands, the public can be shut out.

The same is true for river access or dispersed access for recreational activities like hunting, berry picking, and skiing. This year, The Wilderness Land Trust secured public access with several successful projects.

In the **Weminuche Wilderness** of Colorado, the 31-acre Great Western Lode property contains several sections of the popular 9.3-mile Whitehead Trail, which connects to the Continental Divide Trail to local trails. With the property's purchase and pending transfer, this access is now secured for generations to come. Also in Colorado, in the **Mount Massive Wilderness**, the very popular and easily accessed North Fork Lake Creek Trail runs through the 21-acre Blue Lake property which was recently transferred to public ownership. Not only did this

project protect public access, it completed the Mount Massive Wilderness, removing the last remaining private inholding.

Finally, in Oregon's **Hells Canyon Wilderness**, 82 acres on a scenic bench overlooking the Snake River was added to the wilderness area securing public access on the Reservoir Bench Trail. In protecting public access, these projects help people from all walks of life experience the wilderness for themselves, finding their own love for it, and becoming advocates for it.

When private wilderness inholdings change hands, the public can be shut out for access to recreational activities. This year The Wilderness Land Trust secured public access with several projects.





The 1,000-acre Cougar Canyon project contains varying terrain and several water sources, making it important climate change resilient habitat.

EXPANDING OUR WORK TO UTAH



In the organization's 31-year history, The Wilderness Land Trust has completed projects in almost every western state. Over the last year we have been hard at work to expand our work into one more, with our first Utah project in the **Cougar Canyon** and **Slaughter Creek Wilderness Areas**.

When we begin working in a new area, we start by building relationships with local private landowners, federal land management agencies, organizations, and tribes. Understanding the values and needs of the local community is an important first step in ensuring that our work will support not only the wild places we're striving to protect, but also the people who have loved them for generations, and the groups already working to benefit them.

So, as we start our work in Utah, it's with an understanding of the larger landscape of its conservation efforts.

Utah can be a challenging state for conservation work: about 71% of Utah is public lands, but only 4% of that is protected as wilderness. Knowing this, the Trust's ability to utilize Section 6 of the 1964 Wilderness Act, to donate private property adjoining wilderness to public ownership and have it become protected wilderness without an act of Congress, provides an exciting opportunity for expanding Utah wilderness.

Our work in a new area starts by building relationships and understanding the values and needs of the local community.

Southern Utah has some of the most visited public lands in the state, including Zion National Park, which is only about 50 miles from our Cougar Canyon project. Use of popular public lands like Zion is changing rapidly, with visitation almost doubling from 2.8 million visitors to 5.1 million visitors annually in the last decade. Management systems like permits and lotteries are being implemented to protect Zion's incredible landscape and ecosystems,

but they are also leaving more and more visitors who can't get in searching for recreation opportunities on other nearby public lands. This is putting pressure on areas that previously had little use, often impacting resources and pushing wildlife out. The 1,000-acre Cougar Canyon project area contains higher elevation, varying terrain, and several water sources, making it important climate change resilient habitat. Protecting habitats like these, with little managed recreation opportunities, ensures a refuge for wildlife and resources, even as the pressure of rising visitation and expanding development grows.

We are excited to share more about this special place and the opportunity to protect it with you this summer.

FROM PIGS TO PEAKS

Getting to know Trust supporter Jeff Guddat

Growing up on a small dairy farm near the Columbia River Gorge, Jeff Guddat has always felt a strong connection to place. As a child he and his four siblings helped tend to the animals, gardens, and orchards that supplied their family with most of their own food. From a young age he came to understand everything was connected on the farm: when the pigs were turned out in the fruit orchards they were fed by the fallen fruit and in turn fed the trees in a cycle that sustained not only the land, but also him. From the family's approach to farming and stewarding their land, Jeff learned the importance of aiding these natural cycles, not disturbing them, which would set the stage for a lifetime of loving and respecting wild places, both close to home and at the top of the world.

"It wasn't wilderness, not pure raw wilderness, but [the farm] was a great introduction to the relationship between nature and humans, learning how to be respectful of the environment."

The view from the farm was dominated by Mount Hood, which often called the family away to explore it on weekend camping trips. These trips were the first time Jeff remembers encountering true wilderness, his earliest memory of which was marveling at how incredible it was to be there, on the mountain that he saw from home every day.

His love for mountains grew when, in 1980, Jeff was on a flight into Seattle. When they flew over Mount Rainier, he looked out the window and immediately thought "I need to go there, I need to do it." Three years later he summited Mount Rainier, and over the course of the next several decades would follow it with summits of peaks from the Pacific Northwest to Kilimanjaro, often with his kids in tow: "There's nothing like getting out there and breathing the fresh air and feeling the connection."

These days Jeff is often struck by a different feeling when flying into Seattle, especially at night. "Every year you see lights from developments getting closer and closer to Rainier.

It just keeps going and going and eroding at the edges. It's an erosion of solitude really" he says. When he first heard about The Wilderness Land Trust, Jeff and his wife Sharon were drawn to the mission, "We have five kids and now they have kids, and I worry about what will be left for them. I hope through organizations like the Trust we can protect some of these incredible places. I hope when our grandkids want to be able to get away from it all they'll be able to do that." Inspired by this hope, Jeff and Sharon have generously supported the Trust's annual operations and North Cascades conservation campaign.

Jeff still carries the lessons of respect for the land learned from his childhood on the farm and time in the alpine. He and Sharon have dedicated themselves to protecting and stewarding their three-acre property. "It's our home, but it's also the home of wetlands, and streams full of salmon, and healthy forests and wildlife. We see ourselves as custodians of it until the next generation can come along and take care of it."

"We see ourselves as custodians of it until the next generation can come along and take care of it."

— Jeff Guddat, pictured on his second ascent of Mt. Rainier, celebrating his 50th birthday





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SPRING 2023 NEWS

Join us in keeping the promise of wilderness!



Whether you give once a year, monthly, through a donor-advised fund, or as part of your planned giving, you are building a legacy of conservation in the wild places you love.

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